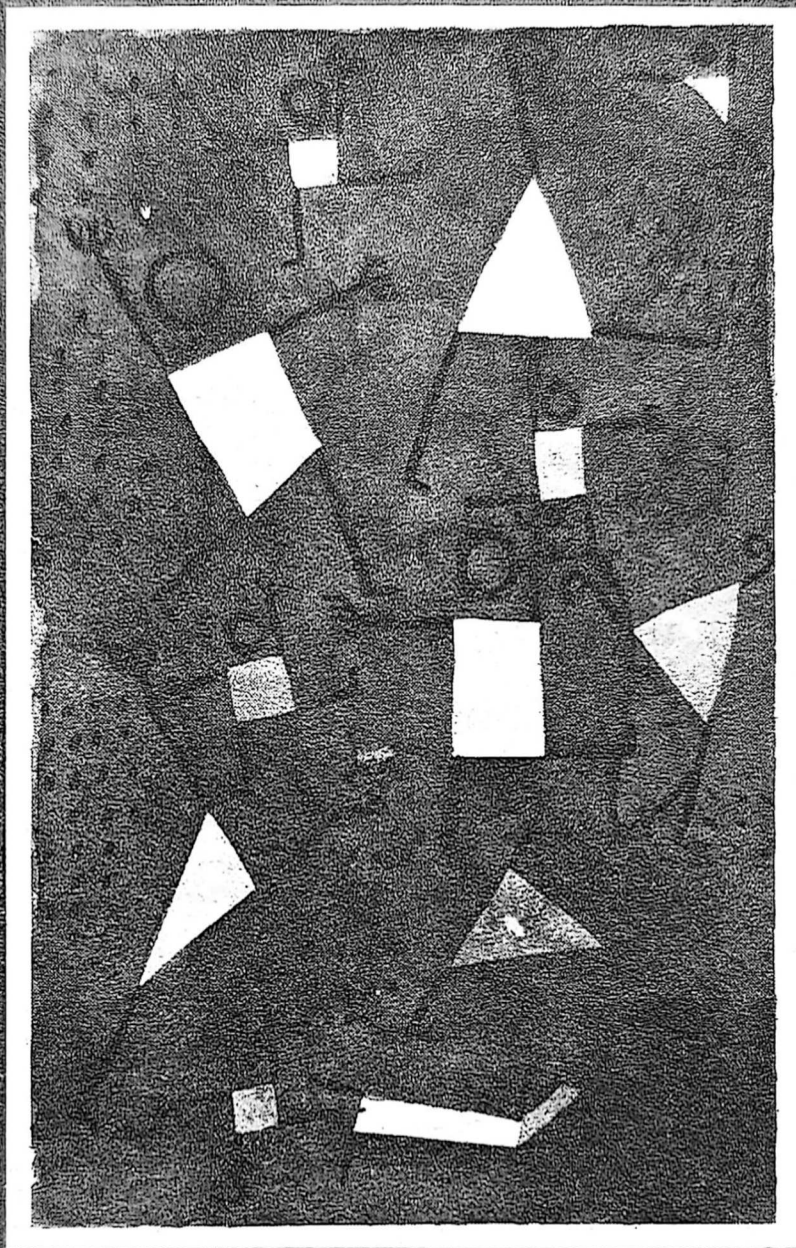


DANCES OF THE OBSCURE

PENTTI SAARIKOSKI



TRANSLATED FROM THE FINNISH BY
MICHAEL COLE & KAREN KIMBALL

10.
AS IS
(Some
PEN)
OP

DANCES OF THE OBSCURE

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The cover of this edition is illustrated with Paul Klee's *Tänze vor Angst* (*Dancing for Fear*), a watercolor dating 1938 and held by the Klee Foundation in Bern.

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This is the first edition.

The translators dedicate this volume to their families.

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DANCES OF THE OBSCURE

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LOGBRIDGE-RHODES

tyttö
kaunis kuin voikukka
otti minua kädestä ja sanoi
Minä olen valo joka johdatan sinut pimeään
Sadossa ei ole kehumista kun nostan perunoita
kesä oli kuiva, minä olin laiska
kaunis kuin voikukka
Meidän on nukuttava limittäin
jalat koukussa
näitä sänkyjä ei ole tarkoitettu meidän kokoisillemme ihmisille
Puhelen harakoiden kanssa että kaikki
maailman ihmiset
ovat minun lapsiani ja sinä olet valo
kaunis kuin voikukka johdatat
minut pimeään
Olen syönyt hyvän ja pahan tiedon, taivas on pilvessä
filosofiat ja politiikat taittavat kuin kuivat oksat

kun olin delegaatio ja teoria
Haravoin lehtiä, lasken
minun kahdeksas syksyni täällä
meri on musta, minä mietin
kirjettä keisarille, halveksin häntä
Mitään niin vihreätä ei ole
kuin vuorten rinteet aamulla auringon noustessa

DANCES OF THE OBSCURE

a girl
beautiful as a dandelion
took my hand and said
I'm the light that leads you into darkness
The harvest is nothing to brag about when I dig potatoes
the summer was dry, I was lazy
beautiful as a dandelion
We have to sleep, our bent
legs overlapping
these beds aren't meant for people our size
I tell the magpies that all
the world's people
are my children and you are the light
beautiful as a dandelion you lead
me into darkness
The sky is cloudy, I have eaten good and bad knowledge
philosophies and politics break off like dry twigs

when I was the delegation and the theory
I raked leaves, I have counted
my eighth autumn here
The sea is black, I thought about
writing to the emperor, I despise him
There is nothing as green as
a hillside in morning sunrise
I was a mycologist, self-taught
I went into the woods and held it
I saw color, I bit off a piece on my tongue
tasted it then spit it out
Now I'm here

some sour rye and cheese
 on the table, a bottle of wine, some cigarettes, some
 apples
on the floor a rusty brown autumn glow in a blue coffee pot
 I eat some sour rye and cheese
 I drink wine and smoke a cigarette
 Now I wash some apples
I cut reeds in the autumn glow
 The car drives along the highway, turns into the yard
I try to speak simply enough for an adult to understand
 the car drives along the highway, turns into the yard
 the house is painted white

 I am the road
 I walk along
 with such effort — a delegation, a theory —
I was an old authoritative man
 chosen
to climb a mountain, a pedestal
 from which to see the world
 tilled fields, the sea
 people at work, a laborer
turns a grindstone, a farmer
 surveys
 his freshly plowed field, in the post office
 they sort mail and in the cemetery
crosses decay
 I have gone up the mountain to say goodbye
to poetry, here they are, they carve statues
 I don't need to drop names anymore
they wrote books, they founded religions, they ordered
 their own embalming and were embalmed
 At first there wasn't a bear's raspberry patch
 the berries came in small
 when we finally got some rain, they were waterlogged
I sat on a rock, on the rock where I now sit

I thought
This world is nothing but a graveyard
and a parting, as the last one
I go to where there are no farewells
no cross rotting on a grave
darkness comes and the days
are loosened from each other like stinking train cars
Those who are free from the sun's tutelage
don't create art
which all the churches
curse, I have seen
the hand gesture, I can never forget it

You weren't summoned here and you aren't here
cities, evenings
I miss evenings and loneliness which is the only experience
I also long for that town where the telephone book
is a bibliophilic rarity
I sat there on the river bank not thinking about anything
later it's another town
but was it spring or summer
I read a great poet's lines about house walls
Loneliness, cities
where the traffic is jammed
though the streets are wide and there are few cars
now I understand why this is inevitable
but I don't want to try to explain it
something is missing, the day has arrived like a blighted potato
I sat in a boat
others
have long since died or live somewhere in another city

A push doesn't shorten the night
smoke settles to the ground
 now I begin to remember
 I had found a boot in the dump
 and hung it from the ceiling
 I put the right-sized tin pot in the shoe
I tied another rope to the cord from which the boot hung
 and its free end to my suspenders
now I had an ashtray
 A push doesn't shorten the night nor a song broaden a
 spade
Now I remember, smoke settled to the ground
 I held an alder branch
I had joined the work force

Obscurity dances
 by himself, the trees don't speak to him
 a bird
 doesn't look
the bear has gone to his den
 to sleep, he no longer thinks about waking
 Obscurity dances
 he has forgotten
not only what happened, but his memory
 studied spiders, a web
 is a spider's face and fingerprints
The trees have something else to do, they have to
shake off their leaves

Obscurity dances
he administered government business, knew it well,
 knew his subjects' spiritual life
 their conduct
One spider's web is like no other's, it dissolves with the
evening
 it can't be repaired, the spider doesn't die

Obscurity dances
in his duties the government official had tried to
prove that his colleagues based their view
of government
economics
on the one hand on wishful thinking
about their own resources
and on the other on the
economic inexperience of leaders in neighboring states
The bird doesn't look, the bushes are rigid as stalactites
the spider doesn't die, the web just dissolves, morning
dew
is thin threads, hair
Obscurity dances
he thought
the sun was
new every day
like a spider's web
He thought that the bear's sleep is his work and that
a dreamworld was the basis of the universe
he went into a cool grove
where the thinkers met
I drink wine and talk
Obscurity dances, the bear sleeps
it's a place to start — soon the spider is spinning again —
His theory doesn't strike the philosophers as interesting
a dog, on closer look
an Egyptian princess
followed by two servants
came forward to greet me
I could interest her in nothing
I showed her a painted dartboard, an English one
it's a black disk with yellow rays of light
emanating from the center
I said its beams don't go beyond the circle and I showed her

I explained, here in the north
the sun will hang
all winter in a tree branch
My father's strength is greater than the sun's
the princess said
don't form any clubs or organizations

The wind is coming up, I'm coming home
from gathering mushrooms
I have some mushrooms in a basket
On the road the shadows of grains of sand are long
even though it's just noon
with a proud eye I look at the mushrooms I've found
If I didn't know I live in that house I would think
happy people live there
my handwriting gets crumpled and constricted, writing is
my skin
At home I start to make stewed mushrooms
I remember, only last year
there were so many people in the house and on the farm
now there is no one
it seems oppressive
the potato kettle mutters
They aren't living people
they died long ago, those to whom I spoke,
but death did not separate them from me
life separated me from them
I studied a map, the boundaries
didn't always meet
it turned out to be lakes
some deep lakes
some shallower lakes
ponds and pools would remain between profiles
well then how would toes, cold toes, meet
when the tropics are rooted to each other

Horses eat bread from my hand, night turns
like the emperor who can't get to sleep in his broad bed
I said fifty-five alder leaves
when the tax collector kept asking what I own

The boundary is from the junipers to the stone wall
I looked for a wine bottle which I had hidden somewhere
A girl with her nose in the air, came licking ice cream and said
you are strange
you always seek the road
off the mountain out of the woods
and away from your darkness
you cry out
some of your dead friends
whom you miss
like a bald head misses its hair, don't you understand
An arrogant girl licked ice cream
you don't realize that
in the darkness
the red's red
the red of a frostbitten lingonberry looks black
this has happened to your friends
I am the light
that leads you into darkness
and then you see cows, six black speckled cows
in the green fields
— a massive skeleton
fleshy, fatty limbs
a splendid healthy herd, six dairy cows
gulls peck the humus
for worms and other wrigglers
a cow has four stomachs
first food goes to the rumen
then from the first stomach to the reticulum
from the reticulum it goes back up to the mouth
now the cow lays down, legs bent under it

and chews its cud, it is thinking for a cow and it thinks
it is a long time before the food
reaches the third stomach
and travels to the fourth, the rennet
from there it goes on
and the only remaining intellectual exertion the cow has
with the food
is to get rid of it

My birth had nothing to do
with anything portentous
or supernatural
the time that I fell into
wasn't interesting, even in educated circles
indeed there were still those
who sometimes believed in one god or another
but among the gods there wasn't one
who would have boasted that he created man, a dull time,
Not more than two
or three
thousand years, then it was over
Men should not have begun their studies of nature
why should one study it
the labyrinth was a mere fraud, I myself
built it, it's not a metaphor
and I didn't kill any monster
or found democracy
or teach the town maidens a dance pattern
A dull time
there is nothing noble in war anymore
hiding their faces, men crawl on all fours
to wagons which are the only lights on ever-darkening roads

The *Lady Ellen* sails
to where neither
the moth eats nor rust harms
nor
creditors make their demands — it takes money
His dream realized, Aristotle sits in the cabin
and looks at the sea
he looks in such a way
that the sea seems to look back at him
what does he think
he thinks about yesterday's appearance
on television, he is satisfied
ingratitude is the world's reward, he said
The *Lady Ellen* sails
now we sail past the island that's
like a seal sinking in the water
Aristotle
moves to the deck, gasping a little
for fresh air, we'd soon be
in international waters, if I take the tiller
he said to the skipper
Here I may have reason to point out
that those who kept me busy are dead
and unborn gods
In this time of angels, I see nothing very puzzling

you walk past the fish church and glance all around
from a helicopter they film you for the TV screen
so you'll look like the inconsequential man you are
they ask you what you like
about this Aristotle and his brother
Strange men, you say
both nice and clever men
I sit
on the liar's bench

there at the wall of the fish church
a bad taste rises from the pit of the stomach to the mouth
Eyes shaded
you walk across the market square
the helicopter dropped lower
to film your crushed hand when it grasps the door handle
then
you sit in a cafe opposite me, we drink coffee
you say
that they've been good men after all
then you recalled for me the fine summer day
when you took me to the home shore
the boat pattered so pleasantly

You have to
get rid of
the world view that you can
see the world
There are scabs on the potatoes, milk sours, if you want
to safely cross the street cross
when the traffic light turns red

The delight of picking mushrooms is being with someone
people shout to each other so they won't be separated
they take cigarette breaks
now here we sit and smoke cigarettes
the squirrel is an agile animal but the rabbit
what do you have against the rabbit
when it lifts
its back legs like that
like what
its hind legs are shorter than the front legs
just like a man's
but they aren't called front legs, they are called hands
When we sit here we speak like this
people look into each other's baskets and showoff

what they have just picked
The berry picker's work
is solitary

even though you are with a friend
you can only take pride in the amount
more diligently or fastidiously picked

We spoke of these things and we smoked cigarettes
the nutritive value of berries is no less than mushrooms
but the berry picker's social status

is lower than the mushroom gatherer's
With mushrooms, the most important thing is quality
with berries, it is amount, we discussed this while smoking
Sometimes a mushroom gatherer

and a berry picker
meet each other, coming from different directions
they don't nod or say hello
they both sit on the stump
that is also the elk's traffic signal
and what else do they say

they chat, tear off
moss and smell autumn in it, cautiously



they probe for
a possible friendship

I hope this was understood, now it is blowing, it is storming
look how differently pine and spruce branches act
when it storms, study it



The sky grows humble

and thinking


doesn't lead to anything

we are always

lost

From those woods I think you could flush out
The thirty thousand slaves needed in
Laurion silver mines
they create the physical basis of Sophocles' life's work
and for Pericles' work that led to Athens' downfall
This is Aperion
the ideology of never-completed growth
that you need
to think your thought to its conclusion
in the evening
god
rides along the mountain ridge
his forehead presses against the horse's neck
he seems somehow depressed
I climb a tree *
to see what happens
as the horse tries to work his way down the icy road
But you can't see better from the tree

From this house I remember only
the shadows of the staircase railing
on the wall beneath the entrance hall window
The way up and down is the same
we were young, we were friends *
or were we really
Red lathwork paths criss-cross the garden lawn
they're needed for building, the sustaining idea
Was that people are more important than houses
the way is one and the same, the trip
wasn't a utopia for us now we are *topos*
we are seated, we eat bream
you've caught the fish
and prepared it well
First, if you remember, we talked, now we are the topic of
conversation
We are tangible abstractions

the sun is setting, before he grasps this
a man
is destroyed
because he doesn't understand the link between beginning
and end
At the dentist they fed my tooth into the computer
now even that
freedom is gone
at least when chewing bread, you feel
like yourself, but they — the two percent —
are in power
and want to know the condition of the subjects' teeth
because it has an effect on the condition of the soul
thus one can keep a file on people dangerous to society
on the basis of the condition of the teeth
Looking for invariance is crazy work
a hand is a hand but what is an idea
I had to piss into a head wind
so I wouldn't be seen from the police station
automobile tires float along the shore
the world is
a moment of time
silhouettes cut from black paper → 
they move slowly, then
At the market, when I walked across the square
I met a man who greeted me by raising his cap
or rather it looked like the cap
rose in the air by itself
and he held the visor
so it wouldn't drift away from him

When I opened my eyes I cried and groaned
that I had to be born here
the one who has closely watched
and kept on watching the fresh inner surface of cut meat
understands

what I am talking about
A gust of wind throws hay helter-skelter to me it's
an event, a thought
which through everything controls everything
in the beginning was the word
was it a cry of distress I thought
when I looked through the greasy window
at a boat running aground
or a shout of joy
when I walk along the office's maze of corridors
and can't find my way out
or was it a sigh
let there be light
I sink down in an easy chair to smoke
passing workers look at my sweater
angry because it doesn't show where I belong

the swans begin
to gather
by the cove, like parliaments
they circulate the news in question
they examine their condition
I make such observations as a melancholy man makes
the boat is
rotted by water
~~the one who sat there and rowed it~~
~~is dead~~
he died suddenly, though it had been expected
since his life wasn't
healthy, swans
are mean birds, bad birds
they run along the water on the back of the island
I have to leave for a return trip, I think that when
a man
is
dead

they should put him in his boat
it is his woman
put him carefully into the tarred boat and burn it
near sunset so that the sun shines through the smoke
for those who had loved the deceased
no man's boat should be left to rot
If I'd sit here on the boathouse steps for a moment
You'd ask me what I am
I am all that
I know
you'd ask when I'm going on a trip
how long I'll be gone
I'll be away until I'm here again
You pester me with thoughtless questions
you interrogate me
to find out when I'll leave
which I don't now know

The bells in the doorway ✱
ring
pleasantly when it's windy
I went into town
as I drove across the suspension bridge I thought
that magpies fatten up needlessly while I
like food more than eating it, and I wondered
whether that was fog
or poisonous gases discharged from a factory
Girls and boys ride along the bicycle path
from school to home, I considered
the world's current political issues
can one admit as a state, a government which isn't a country
Am I a state, yet one day
someone coming to visit
will quickly hang me by his belt
the end never
finds the beginning, I have

written with chalk on both black
and green chalkboards
even long sentences

but

it doesn't help, the end never finds the beginning, maybe it's
impossible

On the day when I heard
that our tyrant died
I went for a walk in the woods

A girl
beautiful as a juniper bush
ran after me to lament the dog's running away
I said, don't go into these woods
are there lions there she said
There are no lions but there are trees
you'll get lost if you go in there

The dog will get lost if I...
the girl said over her shoulder as she swung her hips
I walked into the woods
a footprint gently imprinted in moss
the tyrant is dead

I picked a mushroom, smelled it and stormed off
into the wood's deep heart
the pine forest darkness
it is my soul

the tyrant was dead, the girl sat on a stump

I told her to go home, she said

I can't go home, I am lost

you yourself said that I would be
Then why did you enter the woods when I forbid it
Because I didn't know what getting lost means

The tyrant was dead
a gap-toothed ancient
walked a bicycle, he led it into a stable, I asked

who owns that woods
My son-in-law, he said
Then tell your son-in-law to chop down the pines
as long as you can still get some kind of price for them
let the spruce have a chance to grow, I said
a pine is beautiful but as raw material for paper
it's a bad tree

You're right he snickered as he went on his way
pine is a bad tree for making paper

I walked home, I kicked heather
a girl held my hand and said
in a little girl's voice that
heather doesn't understand human speech

sounds from different directions
all at once,
rain, a television,
a mouse

these are the usual voices
but the sound of the dead is distinctive
like the sound of a frozen mushroom
when it is stepped on


Nowhere at no time
I won't want this
but I sit on the floor with my legs crossed and hold
on my knees those
who built this world
and knew the wind before I did

There have always been certain reservations about me
and for some reason I know it and even understand
that society can't tolerate anything
but in my jacket
is a secret pocket which even the police can't detect

in it is a heating pad, very useful in jail
I paced in a cell, I did some calisthenics, which are poetry
my Estonian friends in their own cells
groan, growl, and think about themselves
The window was painted white, the floor was linoleum
I sat there, legs bent up, and thought
the world was now of this size
the guard rattled the door open
and said
in a severe voice
Try not to think in here

two ravens, a thought, and a memory
flew around the earth's circumference
these, my agents, flew without rest
they get to sleep in the hollow of a cloud's knee
I ride an eight-legged horse
the ravens peck at my eyes and ears
what has happened in the world
in the woods where I ride a spotted orchid grows
ferns and mushrooms
the harness is silver
brilliantly embellished gaiters are on the horse's eight legs
all possible colors
because it's day the stars are dim
they are pearl gray
some are almost black
as I ride
my eight-legged horse
A thought says
it's useless to ride
the lands I thought you would get are already lost
and memory says
the paths your horse paved with his hooves
are not the paths I recalled to you

Thought and memory look at me from the horse's frontal
bone
now you know


The clouds in the sky break up, a farmer walks along the edge
of a ditch to the pasture, he thought
what has yet to be done
before winter's arrival, and he even thought
about selling the woods
In the end, the mammoths and the archaeopteryx
are my teachers

I carve eyes in the cutting board
to create
a little joy for a lonely man's evening
but the trees
rock fearlessly in the wind

Obscurity dances
there is no other world
than the one he wrote about
with his skewer on a cow's skull
spider webs hang from his fingers when he dances
he dances through a sentence he wrote
You don't know anything about the world until you've seen
a lizard eyeball-to-eyeball, so he dances
ants climb up his legs


they piss
in his hair, they crawl
into his seminal duct, they sap
his strength, a snake
pushes his tongue deep in his ear and whispers
Not me
even though I know, I won't tell

the tide was in, the sea iron gray
waves swelled from shore toward the open sea
the wind bit his neck, what to do
our thoughts, our desires
are still facial expressions, it's difficult
to decide beforehand and later try to explain
I looked at a house on a mountain balcony, I remember the
war years

a late summer evening on the fell
when adults
ate crayfish and clinked glasses
I never saw, in this
house, any life
although the road surely goes there
it's not an abandoned house, just vacant
I am too thin to fill out my jacket
Water slapped over the breakwater's stone staircase
tiny-legged fish crept along the bottom steps
then night comes
a long-clawed night, sacred darkness
to load the boat
I push it into the water
not knowing
where the sea will take the cargo, or who will unload it

The wind coughs till its lungs rupture, I sit in
a public toilet and open my flask
my neighbor in the other stall opens his flask
he shits, I shit
I light a cigarette, he lights one too
so in this remote country
we talk, the authority notes
this connection to a fellow creature
but I nevertheless point out
that this doesn't merit
my isolation

The wind coughed till its lungs ruptured
a long time ago when I was a young man


He gave me
the arbor vitae in a kitchen crock on the table
so I would watch it grow
and then when it was spring
we'd plant it together, on the northern slope
what will happen to it — tall as a house or tower? —
Then when it grows to full height
I'll boil its leaves for evening tea 
I'll boil its leaves for evening tea he is dead

I climb a tree as high as I can
Like a squirrel a girl comes to me
over there is the sea, I point
Arbor vitae doesn't take root in this soil
the girl says, no one from your house dies
I swung down from the tree
to do the daily chores

I left the oven door open and put in bread
in the morning mice danced there like crazy drunks
I closed the door and turned the oven to high
The subject has to know about the leader's spiritual life
I explained my motives

then later in the day
I leaped downhill and across puddles
houses crouch for fear of collapsing
a friend hurries across the market, his head bent down
So it can rain
The grouse gets smaller but this isn't the beginning of the end, I
said

Better one bird in the hand than two in the bush, he
said

God has prostate trouble, I said to that
So isn't he already old, he said
there in the market, we made faces while it rained 

it is unwarranted, you must concede
that God as the most active centenarian
accomplished odds and ends
even if he wasn't able to determine the problem of his own
existence

a problem
I went into a pastry shop and bought coffee and a cheese
sandwich

I thought, there is no such world
that of its own accord could be tangibly explained

A girl sat at the next table
with some German, they spoke German
the girl combed the boy's beard with her finger

A little bird
flew in one window and out another

I am a wolf
which defends itself
from the fox
as the monkey watches

at nightfall, when sorrow reproaches me, I say goodbye to
wandering

in the woods I asked the larch if I could take
some of its branches

trees don't talk much

as I walked home along the highway I saw our house
and thought we lived there

It's not far now

the moon is in the crotch of the alder and it's cold
sleep, sleep

we'll soon be there

Many have passed along the road here to the sea shore
they have gone to sea

many have come back

even bringing goods, many have not returned
sleep, sleep now
Men built a sea monster from wood and sailed
to other lands and met natives
they carried off casks and tools
sleep child you're tired
Then they made ships whose masthead
was a large-breasted girl
soon it will be winter, the dance floor will be covered by snow
shadows meet on the snow's crust
separate
then run off
sleep, now sleep, rest
boats are in their home ports
except those that stayed in foreign ports for the winter
or those that had trouble at sea
sleep, rest a little

the sky was now clear
I looked at the trees' leafless branches, they were like fingers
then I went to the center of the pine forest
I thought there wasn't a greener green
than a spruce when the skies clear after four weeks of rain
School children and old women sat in the bus
I didn't belong to either group
but I was there somehow crowded between them
In reality, no state is large or independent
the sovereign falls, the autonomous is smothered
and the large needs so many legs that it stumbles
while I looked at the school children I thought
and I thought as I looked at the old women
thinking is my work
A forest birch is beautiful when the road turns up the hill
I am also a vessel which gets shipwrecked
certainly I'm not the world
as a man in the crowd, I doze, my tossed hair hanging down

There isn't any difference
in the faces of young and old people
the young are already old, the aged still young
I'm no different, just now
I can't explain my sorrow any other way
you can't hold on to time
As I walked home

I looked at the sky
my load was heavy, I walked with slow steps
the sky was
like newly polished copper pots, all in a row on a shelf

He looks in the distance for his destination
he thinks his thought, a cloud's shadow
across the meadow, he is content
This is his thought and with it he is content
and he sets out to sell his thought
he puts lunch in his knapsack, two big fish eyes
some roots, cheese
heather blossoms and nettle leaves
he walks along the road singing some kind of song
in the town it's market day and he travels there
to sell his thought
he looks around
somehow everything is just as it should be
he is very happy, he knows
the road he's carved out, and he already knows
that his thought won't sell
I don't talk about the world and its places
rather, I talk about the neighborhoods and their world
you can't contest what I say
I started to teach the magpies table manners
they quickly understood the idea
that they would have to eat their food
each sitting at his own footstool
they can't jump on the table, there were many dissenters

their system is quite well-intentioned

I thought

that if as my duty they let me

form a government, would I appoint my minister

from those who jump on the table

or from those who sit on footstools

intended for them
around a flat rock in the yard
which is twenty centimeters high

I have also placed six, twenty centimeter blocks
as footstools for the magpies

so they would learn their table manners

The magpies come quickly for their breakfast when
they see me at the kitchen table

eating my breakfast

and thinking, night is not a difficult matter,

night doesn't nudge but the days

would be impossible if the magpies despised me

In the afternoon, on Theory's road

Folly and Malice tackled me

Folly sat on a rotting wood pile

with a puckered upper lip and sputtered
you are foolish

a little further up, under a rose bush

Malice hid

on a furrowed brow and yelled you are evil

I went up the steps to the dance floor
in the sky summer clouds enticed me
to dance with them but I didn't want to, I felt heavy

I lay down on the ground

and listened to the grass

A girl woke me so I wouldn't catch cold

brown-eyed, beautiful as wolf bane

I said that heat and cold are the same thing

cold penetrates a person through the stomach
heat through the back
I sat up and noticed that there were still two apples in the tree
The girl laughed
you are crazy, go eat
mother has already set out plates
of potatoes, meatballs, and white onion sauce

no person can expect
to walk downstairs as quickly as up
On the grass there were fish bones which should have been
picked up

and bird droppings
on the rock face, but the rain will wash it off
Classical sensibilities disappear from the picture, love and hate

“diffugere nives,” I thought
although it still hadn’t snowed
I wore a helmet made from a lion’s skull
bronze eyebrows

I didn't dare go in
although I was hungry
mother has four breasts and her womb is as big as a royal hall

* brown leaves clog the ditch, wind came from the northeast
A pine is like a trotter training for the race, it isn't

nervous

I gather some wood and heat up stones till they're warm
I don't give as much as the world gives you,
except for my peace, that's what I give you
the wind blew so hard it was perfectly calm
unrealized money is a disgrace for the banker
I pluck up my character with courage
The door flies open, I hold the handle tightly
with both hands, it's no use
it slams, we sit in the doorway

through the keyhole, we look at a world that now interests us
a girl grows two meters
maybe you have the key to this door she says
so we could get down

Today I haven't seen a single person
but when it snowed all day
I felt like I'd dealt with everyone
They teach us many things
that the world is a place
from which we need to flee
Now as I walked along the road, the snowfall
whitened it, defined bootprints
when I looked over my shoulder
as I walked I remembered
the conversation of two old women
baking ginger cookies may cause
very bad problems
for the arms, calves, or back
as I listened I drew a mental picture
in which a person had such a large eye that it didn't fit
in his head
I then tried
to explain the rope that was tangled in knots
~~I gathered straw~~
and arranged it in a vase on the windowsill
so that the one to whom I'd speak in the evening
would be pleased
I am accused
of not paying attention to the facts
as though I should be a fact
even facts have an order of precedence
A cat jumped from the tree branch to my feet

I went to the woods, to get there you must
cross a creek, you must jump over it
then there is a steep hill
on its slope juniper and a few spruce grow
I wore the wrong boots for the terrain and stumbled
I pressed my cheek to the moss, it crackled a little
it had been a dry summer
I was told that I can get laid in the market square
but I'm not allowed to open my mouth
about facts that don't concern me
The Minister of the Interior gave me permission to go as far
as the square
the Foreign Minister issued his reservations
it is a known fact
that poets, no matter how hard they try, can't understand
I lay down there
I'm still lying down
I picked lingonberries

I thought of tree leaves
and their branches, I thought of glances
which make me real
they make me
a commodity
I should lie down
in this work to study the world, but not myself
since the world is all eyes which inspect me
a severe eye, an ill-tempered whore
On the table I have a lobster
which straightens its tentacles as if to say something
since it would be able to say
a lot about this table and other aspects of its reduced
circumstances, wooden forks
and spoons and ladles in a salt-glaze enamel soup tureen
there are blue designs, I move to
examine them more closely

A girl sat on the rim of a shot glass
so she could lash out at me
you're bound to spill it, I said that
now it's winter
nothing to do
You could sharpen your pencils
or these skewers she said
you could set a trap for a rabbit, you could even do something
that's done in winter
Can you make me a cat's tongue, thinly spread with butter
I snarled her off then read the newspaper
in other parts of the world they wage wars
if there weren't newspapers, there wouldn't be wars
A girl came to say
Can't you leave me in peace
she came to tell me that she will build a room for herself
as I have heard, there should be four walls and a ceiling
What will I do with the floor she asked when I asked
a child walks with most agility on the bare ground
Build your room, build your room, but leave me alone
People
will kill each other
I left to think it over
I walked across the field and thought
As long as wars are portrayed as shocking events
they won't come to an end
must I
travel through all epochs
to find peace
I climbed the university's roof and shouted
logical thinking leads to war and oppression
no one hears
only me
I throw bricks
from the roof to the street
the eaves supporting my feet

I think
my toenails
ought to be cut
This society isn't quite ready, he said
when our leader
drinks clabbered milk in the morning
it dribbles into his nostrils
There is unemployment, there are environmental problems
a balance of trade deficit, inflation
there is a shortage of day care centers
they swig wine
tax fraud is all but a way of life
et cetera
our leader has a nasal twang
What does he intend to do
after society is finished
many now place him as guardian
he's an educated man
doesn't he understand
that a completed society is *contradictio in adiecto*
You can't continue raising objections
a blue-headed yellow wag tail flew into the yard
motacilla flava
it had a quarrel with the magpies
Labia swell when I lick them, clouds, ideas
as well as all living things
are startled, they don't want it, but they do

I had sailed around the globe three times
and in so doing came to acquire enough to buy
a cabin for father
as I was working on it, the stepladder
somehow slipped
and my back was thrown out

now at nine in the morning
every day I have to travel
to report
to the disability fund, since they think
I'd booze up the money otherwise
I asked them if I had a broken leg
would I then have to report to them
tersely they said you don't have a broken leg but a broken back
and that being the case
you must report
they address me formally
obviously since I am such a coarse
looking character
He tells my life, this ship's cook
but I am already in the middle of a spruce forest I think about
him
his hair
standing on end and his nose like a scabby potato
on the year's longest night
a starlit night
a girl sits at the counter and sings
the mice build their passageways
Since he's afraid of death he decides to kill the girl
he puts on outer clothing
and slips a knife in his pocket
they leave for the mountain
the girl says that the bear's raspberries you
didn't pick are frosted
they climb the mountain, the Minotaur sleeps, she says,
He takes her by the hand
they walk down Theory's road
they move close to a trash can
and they see the stars again, the pieces of sky

PENTTI SAARIKOSKI

Pentti Saarikoski (1937-1983) has been an original and prolific force in Finnish literature. His first collections, *Runoja* (*Poems*) and *Toisia Runoja* (*Other Poems*) were published in 1958. His work since then has included fourteen collections of poetry, five prose works, and forty-five translations (among them Joyce's *Ulysses* and Homer's *Odyssey*). *Hämärän tanssit* (*Dances of the Obscure*) was the poet's last volume as well as the concluding work of his "Tiarnia" trilogy. Among the prizes awarded to Saarikoski for his literary work are the Alexis Kivi Prize (1974) and the Finnish Cultural Foundation Prize (1975). Since his death in August, 1983, Saarikoski has become something of a legend in his native Finland, his works widely and enthusiastically received by both the public and the academy.

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